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State Dept. review completed

Czechoslovak-US Negotiations are Slated for January

In a surprise move on 20 December, Prague proposed that negotiations with Washington begin in January with the most difficult economic and financial issues, and end with the less contentious issue of a consular convention. This proposed sequence for negotiations is in direct opposition to the U.S. scenario which called for starting with the less troublesome points. It also flatly contradicts Premier Strougal's remarks to Senator Symington on 1 December that the negotiation of economic questions need not precede agreement on other issues. The Czechoslovak scenario, as set forth by deputy foreign minister Rohal, also is much more conservative than recent statements by the Czechoslovak leadership have suggested.

The Czechoslovak proposal thus calls for starting with the questions of: (1) Czechoslovak gold, which was looted by the Nazis and has been held by the Tripartite Commission at U.S. insistence since the end of World War II; and (2) U.S. claims for compensation for property nationalized by the Communists. In addition, Rohal stressed that Prague expects most-favored nation status to be part and parcel of any agreement.

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Czechoslovakia: More on "Ab Initio"

According to the French Ambassador in Sofia, the Bulgarians claim that Czechoslovakia's allies no longer support Prague's demand that West Germany declare the 1938 Munich Agreement invalid, from the beginning (ab initio). The new formula calls only for the recognition of the agreement's invalidity.

At last week's bilateral political consultations in Paris between a high-level Bulgarian Foreign Ministry official and the Quai's director general of political affairs, the Bulgarian was quite blunt in stating that the Warsaw Pact countries have cleared the way for a successful conclusion of the deadlocked Czechoslovak-West German negotiations on "mutually satisfactory terms."

The conspicuous absence of the "ab initio formula" from several recent bloc speeches and articles has sparked speculation that Prague had lost the support of its allies and,



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indeed, was coming under pressure to compromise on this issue. The Bulgarian revelation, however, is the closest thing to a semi-official confirmation.

At the same time, the Bulgarians have their own axe to grind. The Bulgarian official told the French, for example, that formal establishment of Bulgarian-West German diplomatic relations awaits only the completion of the CSSR-FRG negotiations. The Czechoslovaks, however, have not yet asked the West Germans for a resumption of the talks, which would be a clear indication of a changed position. Whether the Bulgarians are being candid or wishful, the handwriting is on the wall for Prague to read--Bonn has no need to concede its position, while Prague is constrained by the Soviet interest in expanding detente.

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Czechoslovak Intellectual Admits Error

Czech writer Milan Jaris claims that he was duped into signing the petition which requested reduced sentences for Czechoslovakia's imprisoned intellectuals. The petition caused a stir in Prague last week.

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In a statement published in Tvorba, the Party weekly devoted to political, scientific and cultural affairs, Jaris said that he was deceived by liberal writer, Pavel Kohout, into believing that the petition would only go to President Svoboda and would not become part of any "political action in the on-going anti-Communist campaign."

Jaris' statement also identified Jaroslav Seifert as another of the 39 signatories. Both Jaris and Seifert were members of the Czech Writers' Union presidium until last summer's purge reduced that organ from twenty-four to nine members with virtually no carry-overs. Other outspoken writers interrogated by the police in connection with the petition include Ludvik Vaculik, Vaclav Havel, Alexander Kliment, and Ivan Klima. Each has been in and out of trouble since 1969.

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